

Communication Plan for the Development of Villages

Goal: Educate the community about the Village movement and your “Village”, Recruit members.

(Set realistic objectives and a timeline for new members and for renewals; 3 new members a month and an 80% renewal rate)

Messaging:

1. A Village is a non-profit organization that comes from the community for the benefit of the community
2. Self-sustaining; grass-roots
3. Time banking: equal giving and getting
4. Helping people live a full life in their home and their community
5. Make new friends; engage in life; stay healthy
6. Join the life long journey together
7. Getting the most out of all the resources in the area
8. Offers peace of mind

Generally Villages do not use the words seniors, citizens or aging. Ageism is still “alive and well” in the US and it is important to not create images that people can say “that is not me”. It is important that images and messaging are positive, fun, and engaging. Most people when they hear about Villages, think they are an alternative to assisted living or a nursing home. In order to engage people of all ages so that you have a diverse and vibrant community, especially for time banking, it is important to create a picture (and reality) that shows people in an organization that they want to get involved with for themselves and their community for a long time.

Segmented Audience/Marketing: Healthy * Not so Healthy * Frail

A lot of people use age as the marker for their marketing approach but needs change as their health changes. Those changes can happen as they age, but sadly declining health or a medical change can happen at any age, i.e. someone breaks a leg skiing; trips on the sidewalk; chronic illness; early dementia.

Although the images are not that different, your services and offering will vary with the target market. When creating your Village it is important that you develop services and programs that your membership wants and needs and that you reflect this back to them. “You asked for it; we offer it” Your Village must offer value that is included in the membership fee. This value will range from discounts to providers, all the way to the time bank volunteer collaboration to programs that are unique to the Village members. “What do I get for my money?” “Will I only be

with old people?” Your messaging must address these concerns to each segment. Most Villages focus their message on a happy and healthy life now and in the future.

Marketing Strategies:

- A. Create marketing materials
 - 1. Website with public and private sides
 - 2. Facebook page, that starts a conversation
 - a. Foster a meaningful dialogue
 - b. Engage supporters
 - c. Inspire advocacy
 - d. Instagram – communicate story and share images
 - 3. Brochure: flexible one pagers to change for the audience
 - 4. Tri-fold with room for a mailing label
 - 5. Short elevator speech* Note: Be clear that your Village is a network of neighbors helping neighbors to enhance the quality of life for all members of our community.
- B. Create the basics
 - 1. Prepare a member agreement
 - 2. Be able to take credit cards
 - 3. Create volunteer and sign in sheets
 - 4. Develop a training for presenters (ambassadors)
- C. Develop an Ambassador program

This is a group of people who are part of the Village who want to let others know about the Village. They will need to be able to share their story and make it personal why they joined and what they expect to get out of it. Personals stories are critical. It is also important that the ambassador looks and presents the image of your Village. If you want to attract younger people (50's) make sure that that is who is presenting to that audience. (Other presenters- couples; active; engaged; influential in the community; their neighbor)
- D. Hold a launch party
 - 1. Goal is to get people to join the Village
 - 2. Can be held at the Church at the beginning and then do a second one when you expand out to the whole community
- E. Hold “prospect” parties
 - 1. Hold parties to get the message out: muffins in the am or wine and cheese in the early evening
 - 2. Have food; make it fun
 - 3. Create and send invitations and follow up with phone calls
 - 4. Community people (steering com) present for about 15 min.

5. Show one of the VtVN videos- What is a Village?
 6. Have people give their personal reason for being part of the Village
 7. Explain time banking
 8. Open it up to Q & A and discussion
 9. Have Member Agreement for them to sign
 10. Locations: Churches; people's homes; libraries; galleries; Temples; community rooms in the neighborhoods
- F. Other audiences for your message and for referrals
1. Word of mouth is the number 1 referral source
 - a. Create incentive programs for members to get their friends to join
 - b. Have people hold prospect parties at their house and invite their friends/immediate neighbors
 - c. When you have members: have parties where a member brings a friend
 - d. Run a program with a great speaker and invite the community
 2. Local paper
 - a. Prepare outline of article and visit with the media editor
 - b. Write editorials
 - c. Pay for an AD (especially if you are running an event)
 - d. Put all events into the calendar section
 - e. Do all of this online if your local paper is online
 3. Neighborhood Associations
 4. Block parties/local Fairs
 5. More: doctors; hospitals; social service agencies; real estate agents, lawyers; local stores; local GCM's; etc.

People Joining: Overcoming objections – Answering questions

- A. People join Villages for many reasons:
1. They need the services
 2. Support the community idea
 3. So that it is there when they do need it
 4. Their friends joined
 5. They want to be in control of their life and stay in their own home as they age
- B. Objections and the "Not ready yet" crowd
1. I do not need that yet
 2. I do not want to be with old people
 3. I am not old enough to want that yet
 4. I am not a "joiner"

Messages for Benefits of a Village:

1. Villages are a virtual community, founded by residents who want to stay in their homes and neighborhoods.
2. It means enjoying a culture of positive interdependence with people who live near you. It's like the neighborhood your grandmother grew up in where neighbors helped each other because they knew it would be reciprocated.
3. The Village keeps you from moving to an age-segregated community where there are no younger people to interact with.
4. Village members report better quality of life since joining a Village.
5. Village life and volunteering give life meaning and relevance.
6. Villages address directly what recent research has documented as health-related problems caused by social isolation, including depression, increased risk of morbidity, mortality, cardiovascular disease, dementia, and Alzheimer's disease.
7. Real-life social networks (Villages) decrease isolation, the likelihood of institutionalization, and mortality, and increase longevity.
8. Some members view the Village as insurance policy that they can tap into when they need it because they recognize that they cannot stay in their homes indefinitely without a little bit of help.

Phone bank and cheat sheet

1. For all events and even to follow up when people call interested in the Village you can set up a phone calling party.
2. Invite volunteers to someone's house, Church, Synagogue and have everyone call people and see if they are interested.
 - a. Make sure that all volunteers have a script or what to say and a "cheat sheet" about the Village offerings and philosophy so that they can answer people's questions.
 - b. The organizer of this phone bank usually has refreshments. Do not call during dinner hours. In people's experience the best time to call is between 3:30 or 4:00pm and 6:00pm.
 - c. This approach is great to follow up after you send out an invitation to a program, community Village event, or prospect party. It is also great when following up on a lot of calls for information that come into the Village. ***Remember the best approach to "person to person."*** ***Word of mouth is the best marketing strategy.*** *Keep a list of prospects in your database management system and reach out to them frequently with Village news.*

Follow the approaches and you will succeed. Make it personal. If it speaks to you, it will speak to others. Marketing is all about knowing your audience and saying your message through words and images that speak to people. Know your Village. Share your story. People will be interested and your Village will grow.

Contributing Author, vtvnetwork.clubexpress.com